

Cabinet 27th July 2021 Officer delegated decision for procurement of Gigabit Hub Connectivity in Rural Dorset (GHCiRD)

For Decision

- Portfolio Holder:** Cllr P Wharf, Corporate Development and Change
- Local Councillor(s):** A number of wards will have gigabit hubs installed. A final list of wards to benefit will be made available following assurance and contract award
- Executive Director:** A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

The Cabinet is asked to consider the contents of this report in respect of the procurement of Gigabit Hub Connectivity in Rural Dorset (GHCiRD) and that Cabinet:

1. agrees that the decision for contract award, following conclusion of the procurement process, should be delegated to Cllr Peter Wharf as Portfolio Holder, after consultation with Aidan Dunn, Executive Director – Corporate Development.
2. agrees that the decision to enter into the necessary subsequent grant agreements with Building Digital UK (BDUK), which is part of the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sports (DCMS) to delivery this programme of activity should also be delegated to Cllr Peter Wharf as Portfolio Holder, after consultation with Aidan Dunn, Executive Director – Corporate Development.

3. Notes the unusually short timescales involved in developing these proposals. The importance of responding and mobilising quickly to meet the delivery deadlines to facilitate economic recovery from the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and accelerate the deployment of Gigabit capable fibre broadband in rural Dorset.

Reason for Recommendation:

To enable the GHCiRD (BDUK) project to complete due diligence, grant agreement, contract award and finalisation which will facilitate the quickest possible deployment by December 2022.

Executive Summary Decision:

Dorset Council is able to access funding for digital infrastructure improvements from the Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC) project. A Full Business Case (FBC) was submitted to BDUK and subsequently approved on 24 March 2021 with the condition that the procurement notice was issued before the 31 March 2021. Due to these extremely short timescales, the delegated decision and commencement of procurement could not wait until what was the next Cabinet. The decision therefore to proceed the procurement process was taken as an Officer Delegated Decision under the scheme of delegation, following consultation with Cllr Peter Wharf as responsible Portfolio Holder.

Procurement on 110 sites (42 Dorset Council and 68 school sites) associated within the Gigabit Hub Connectivity in Rural Dorset (GHCiRD) project has completed and with a recommendation to award due in early July.

As a result of that procurement this report seeks to request authority to delegate decisions to enable the work to continue, against tight timescale, for a grant application and contract award in August 2021.

The infrastructure budget of around £2.5M, subject to confirmation and final assurance, is being met by a BDUK funding grant.

This is an excellent opportunity for Dorset to obtaining funding to provide gigabit capable infrastructure to help address poor connectivity due to the rural nature of Dorset.

1. Financial Implications

Capital cost infrastructure budget implications being up to £2.5M grant funding, covered by formal grant agreement between BDUK and Dorset Council.

Revenue costs to deliver the project will be managed within the Digital Place team, utilising existing transformation funding to March 2023.

The ongoing revenue costs of the upgraded broadband will be met by Dorset Council for council sites and is expected to be cost neutral as IT Services will look to take advantage of the infrastructure to adopt a new approach which will be more cost effective than the current connectivity charges. Each school or other non-Dorset Council site is expected to meet the revenue costs for their site.

2. Climate implications

Industry research shows a number of carbon footprint reductions that arise from moving from copper networks to full fibre networks. These are referenced in the background documents.

3. Other Implications

As a condition of the BDUK grant funding each site is required to install new or upgrade an existing broadband to, the gigabit capable infrastructure deployed under this project before the grant extended date (expected to be 31st December 2023).

Of all the schools surveyed, 47 responded 37 wanted a service and stated they would like to be included in the project, while another 10 asked for more information. From the initial discussions held with most schools or their IT supplier all are enthusiastic about the project.

The project team will work closely with each individual site to achieve an upgrade or take up of service to mitigate the risk of repaying any portion of the grant relevant to each site.

Should any site not take up new service or upgrade then the Authority will be at risk for the cost of contracting a minimum speed for the minimum term required to that site in order to fulfil the grant conditions. Should this not happen before the Extended Date (expected to be December 2023) BDUK may require the authority to repay the grant funding applicable to that site.

4. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Low

| Summary risks | Mitigations |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Rural deployment practicalities | Joint programme management with the infrastructure provider through delivery |
| End User Sites upgraded | End User Upgrade Sites are upgraded to the Required Speeds on or before the Required Date (December 2023) or risk repayment of grant funding for that site. |

5. Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment of Dorset Councils Digital Vision has been carried out which confirms that provision of better broadband has a positive impact in terms of greater digital connectivity to a number of protected characteristic groups; no negative impacts were recorded.

This programme is all about the benefits of improved fixed and mobile connectivity in rural areas, and these generally have a positive effect.

6. Appendices

None.

7. Background Papers

Notification of Urgent Decision to Full Council (150421) accessed on the following link.

[LINK: Decision - Gigabit Hub Connectivity in Rural Dorset - Dorset Council](#)

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.